

Helping kids find balance with gaming addiction

For parents

Did you know that gaming addiction is classified as a disease by the World Health Organisation (WHO)?

It's a serious issue, particularly in young people. But what does it look like in Australia?

- It is estimated that around 100,000 Australian teenagers are living with gaming disorder. That's what a full house at the MCG looks like!
- Boys aged 15 to early 20s are most at risk. But gaming disorder can impact anyone at any age.
- While we don't know what causes gaming disorder, we know it can originate from video games, internet and social media use.

Hooked, Habit or Hobby

Have you heard of the three H's? This is the formula used by the gaming industry to capture young minds and build loyalty:



Hook

They hook young people in with upfront deals in order to create an emotional investment

Habit

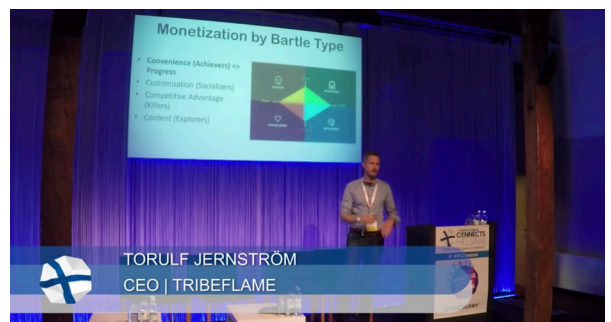
Once they have their attention, they make their game a habit by selling ways to progress

Hobby

This is when young people have invested so much that their hobby begins to disrupt their day-to-day activities

When this hobby becomes a hazard and harmful to the health and wellbeing of young people, clinical intervention by a child or adolescent psychiatrist or psychologist is recommended.

Gaming addiction specialist Dr Kim Le recommends parents watch a video called *Let's go whaling!* to gain a better understanding of the gaming world. The video lifts the curtain on the marketing and psychology tricks that gaming companies use to monetise games and hook players. It's presented by Torulf Jernström, the founder and former CEO of Tribeflame a mobile game development studio based in Turku, Finland.



Know the signs

Playing video games and using the internet in moderation is a normal part of our increasingly digital world. In fact, most young people can take part in this type of activity without becoming addicted.

However, when somebody loses control over their gaming or screen time and it impacts other areas of their lives, often with negative consequences, this is when it becomes a real issue.

If you see these signs over a prolonged period, it may be time to talk to your child:

- Changes in behaviour
- Increased irritability when asked to pause or stop gaming or screen time
- Missing school or other activities to stay home and play games or go online
- Withdrawal from social interaction in favour of online platforms
- Neglecting regular sleep or eating patterns to stay online
- Internet use causing arguments within families



TOP TIP: If you're becoming worried, think about how much time your child spends gaming or on the internet each week. Add it up and if these hours equal more than a full-time job, it's time to seek help.

Just like other health and wellbeing issues, gaming disorder can have a snowball effect. If you don't intervene, it can compromise the developing brain and a young person's ability to:

- Critically think
- Use their judgement
- Control their impulsivity
- Regulate their emotions

Circuit breakers

Here are some ways you can help create a safe gaming environment:

- Be buyer aware – look at game reviews, talk to other parents and be an active player in decision-making
- Seek out game classifications – just like movies, it is a legal requirement to have classifications on video games
- If there's a guideline use it – while it can be time-consuming, product guidelines are designed to help you and your children make informed decisions
- Do your research – there are a number of reliable websites that road test and review games, apps, movies, shows and books like **Common Sense Media**

If excessive gaming or screen time is becoming a concern in your household, you can try:

- Moving computers or devices out of your child's bedroom
- Introducing timers to help signal breaks
- Using calendars to identify key times for gaming or screen activity
- Talking to your children and explaining how their behaviour is impacting others, including you

If it is becoming increasingly challenging to manage your child's behaviour, you can try:

- Installing software to allow you to monitor and limit your child's online activity, like TP-Link Deco Parental Controls
- If they are using school equipment, speak to their teacher about installing software that restricts access
- Reaching out to tech experts, like [Geeks2U](#), to educate yourself on how to use parental controls on your devices



TOP TIP: Your child should be enjoying a balanced lifestyle, with breaks between activities and time to get the important things done - like eating, sleeping, exercising and socialising - ahead of gaming and screen time.

Quick links and resources

- **The Australian Gaming and Screens Alliance** – brings together leading allied health experts to help those impacted by gaming disorder, and to research and advocate for more support
- **The Australian Communications and Media Authority** – can provide the latest news and information on gaming regulation
- **Game Quitters** – is the largest online community support group for gaming addicts with resources for families
- **CGI Clinic** – Dr Kim Le's website which houses clinical information, resources and articles on gaming disorder
- **The Unplugged Psychologist** – provides support and resources for children and families on healthy screen time

If you or someone you know is struggling and needs assistance, help is available.

You can contact:

- Lifeline on 13 11 14 or [lifeline.org.au](https://www.lifeline.org.au)
- Beyond Blue on 1300 224 636 or [beyondblue.org.au](https://www.beyondblue.org.au)



Who is Dr Kim Le?

Dr Huu Kim Le is a child and adolescent psychiatrist and internet gaming disorder specialist who sees patients from across Australia via his telehealth private practice **CGI Clinic**.

His work spans from the clinical treatment of children and young people, and research into gaming disorder in Singapore, India and South Korea, through to hosting SBS On Demand's "**Are You Addicted to Technology?**" and leading advocacy through key channels like **TEDx**.

He is passionate about helping others to enjoy gaming in a healthy way, with his clinic and website supporting families and increasing awareness about internet gaming and overall health.

